



U.S Department of Energy  
Office of Inspector General

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The U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Inspector General is pleased to announce that an inquiry we initiated into a 2014 nuclear waste incident at the Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant has won a Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency Award. Our employees who worked on this inquiry –

- David Sedillo, Director of Western Audits Division
- Aldric Hill, Assistant Director of Western Audits Division
- Joaquin Carney, Team Leader
- Jocelyn Hwang, Auditor-in-Charge

will be honored for their work at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual inspector general community award ceremony to be held in Washington, DC at 10 am on Tuesday, October 22, 2015.

**Background:** On February 14, 2014, a radiological release from a transuranic waste drum was detected in the underground repository at the Department of Energy's (Department) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). As a consequence, underground operations at the plant were suspended and the Nation's only operating deep geologic repository for the permanent disposal of defense-related transuranic waste was shut down. On May 15, 2014, visual evidence confirmed that a breached container that originated from the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos National Laboratory (Los Alamos) was the source of the release.

The U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Inspector General subsequently initiated a special inquiry into this matter. The inquiry team demonstrated extraordinary commitment to improving the development and approval of nuclear waste packaging and remediation techniques at the Los Alamos. Specifically, as noted in the Management Alert on [Remediation of Selected Transuranic Waste Drums at Los Alamos National Laboratory – Potential Impact on the Shutdown of the Department's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, \(DOE/IG-0922, September 2014\)](#), the team identified weaknesses in Los Alamos' procedures for the development and approval of waste packaging, and remediation techniques that may have contributed to a significant radiological event. Management fully concurred with the resulting findings and recommendations and two subsequent Department investigation reports confirmed the inquiry team's conclusions.

**Today:** In response to our recommendations, the Laboratory established a new procedure to ensure that Subject Matter Experts are involved in reviewing all changes to technical procedures. This new procedure ensures that any proposed technical procedure change can be executed safely and requires that changes affecting work authorization be highlighted to the responsible line manager prior to implementation. In addition, the new procedure will define major and minor changes and their required level of review and approval. Finally, although Los Alamos cannot ship waste to WIPP, due to the February 2014 incident, remediation efforts, estimated to cost up to \$551 million, are ongoing and the Secretary of Energy has stated that WIPP is on track to open by the end of 2016.

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